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Children in the wood
[anonymous classic]

London: Sampson Low, Son & Co.
MDCCCLXI.

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THE BABES IN THE WOOD.

Now ponder well, you parents dear,
These words which I shall write:
A doleful story you shall hear,
In time brought forth to light.

A gentleman of good account,
In Norfolk dwelt of late,
Who did in honour far surmount
Most men of his estate.

Sore sick he was, and like to die,
No help his life could save:
His wife by him as sick did lie,
And both possest one grave.

No love between these two was lost,
Each was to other kind,
In love they liv'd, in love they died,
And left two babes behind:

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The one a fine and pretty boy,
Not passing three years old:
The other a girl more young than he,
And fram'd in beauty's mould.

The father left his little son,
As plainly doth appear,
When he to perfect age should come,
Three hundred pounds a year.

And to his little daughter Jane
Five hundred pounds in gold,
To be paid down on marriage-day,
Which might not be controll'd:

But if the children chance to die,
Ere they to age should come,
Their uncle should possess their wealth:
For so the will did run.

Now, brother, said the dying man,
Look to my children dear,
Be good unto my boy and girl,
No friends else have they here:

To God and you I recommend
My children dear this day;
But little while be sure we have
Within this world to stay.

You must be father and mother both,
And uncle all in one;
God knows what will become of them,
When I am dead and gone.

With that bespake their mother dear,
O brother kind, quoth she,
You are the man must bring our babes
To wealth or misery:

And if you keep them carefully,
Then God will you reward;
But if you otherwise should deal,
God will your deeds regard.

With lips as cold as any stone,
They kist their children small:
God bless you both, my children dear,
With that the tears did fall.

These speeches then their brother spake
To this sick couple there,
The keeping of your little ones,
Sweet sister, do not fear.

God never prosper me nor mine,
Nor aught else that I have,
If I do wrong your children dear,
When you are laid in grave.

The parents being dead and gone,
The children home he takes,
And brings them strait unto his house,
Where much of them he makes.

He had not kept these pretty babes
A twelvemonth and a day,
But, for their wealth, he did devise
To make them both away.

He bargain'd with two ruffians strong,
Which were of furious mood,
That they should take these children young
And slay them in a wood.

He told his wife an artful tale,
He would the children send
To be brought up in fair London
With one that was his friend.

Away then went those pretty babes,
Rejoicing at that tide,
Rejoicing with a merry mind,
They should on cock-horse ride.

They prate and prattle pleasantly,
As they ride on the way,
To those that should their butchers be,
And work their lives' decay:

So that the pretty speech they had,
Made Murder's heart relent:
And they that undertook the deed,
Full sore did now repent

Yet one of them more hard of heart,
Did vow to do his charge,
Because the wretch that hired him,
Had paid him very large.

The other won't agree thereto,
So here they fall to strife,
With one another they did fight,
About the children's life:

And he that was of mildest mood,
Did slay the other there,
Within an unfrequented wood;
The babes did quake for fear!

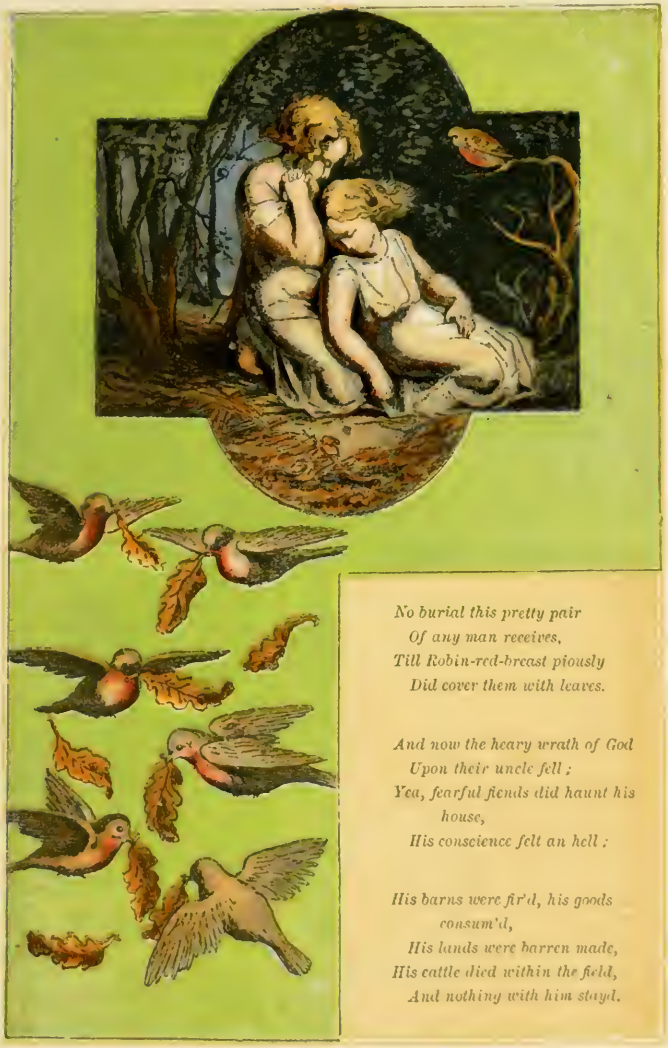
He took the children by the hand,
Tears standing in their eye,
And bad them straitway follow him,
And look they did not cry.

And two long miles he led them on,
While they for food complain:
Stay here, quoth he, I'll bring you
bread,
When I come back again.

These pretty babes, with hand in
hand,
Went wandering up and down:
But never more could see the man
Approaching from the town:

Their pretty lips with black-berries,
Were all besmeared and dyed,
And when they saw the darksome
night,
They sat them down and cried.

Thus wandered these poor innocents,
Till death did end their grief,
In one another's arms they died,
As wanting due relief:



No burial this pretty pair
Of any man receives,
Till Robin-red-breast piously
Did cover them with leaves.

And now the heavy wrath of God
Upon their uncle fell;
Yea, fearful fiends did haunt his house,
His conscience felt an hell:

His barns were fir'd, his goods consum'd,
His lands were barren made,
His cattle died within the field,
And nothing with him stayd.

And in a voyage to Portugal
Two of his sons did die:
And to conclude, himself was brought
To want and misery:

He pawn'd and mortgaged all his land
Ere seven years came about,
And now at length this wicked act
Did by this means come out:

The fellow, that did take in hand
These children for to kill,
Was for a robbery judg'd to die,
Such was God's blessed will.

Who did confess the very truth,
As here hath been display'd.
Their uncle having died in gaol,
Where he for debt was laid

You that executors be made,
And overseers eke
Of children that be fatherless,
And infants mild and meek,

Take you example by this thing,
And yield to each his right,
Lest God with such like misery
Your wicked minds requite.

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